

Yang Zhichao's Art at the Margins

Giorgio Strafella
Daria Berg

University of St.Gallen

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Yang Zhichao 杨志超, Contemporary Artist

- The truly contemporary, who truly belong to their time, are those who don't adjust themselves to its demands.
- The contemporary is someone who firmly holds their gaze on their own time so as to perceive not its light, but rather its darkness.

They perceive the darkness of their time as something that concerns them and never ceases to engage them.

They are who, knowing how to see this obscurity, are able to write by dipping their pen in the obscurity of the present.

(G. Agamben, *What is the Contemporary?*, 2008)

- Mainly known for his “body art” performances such as *Planting Grass* (2000) and *Hide* (2002)
- Art as personal exploration and reflection on marginality
 - the migrant, the nomad, the beggar, the patient of a psychiatric hospital, the common people at the margins of history



The Lanzhou Art Corps

- Born in Lanzhou in 1963, Yang Zhichao studies in Chongqing before returning to Gansu
- Mid-1980s: art groups all over China (Pond Society, Southern Artist Salon... - see esp. Silvia Fok 霍少霞)
- YZC joins the dadaist Lanzhou Art Corps: celebrates the funeral of modern Chinese art



《葬》行为，1993年1月10日至17日，兰州



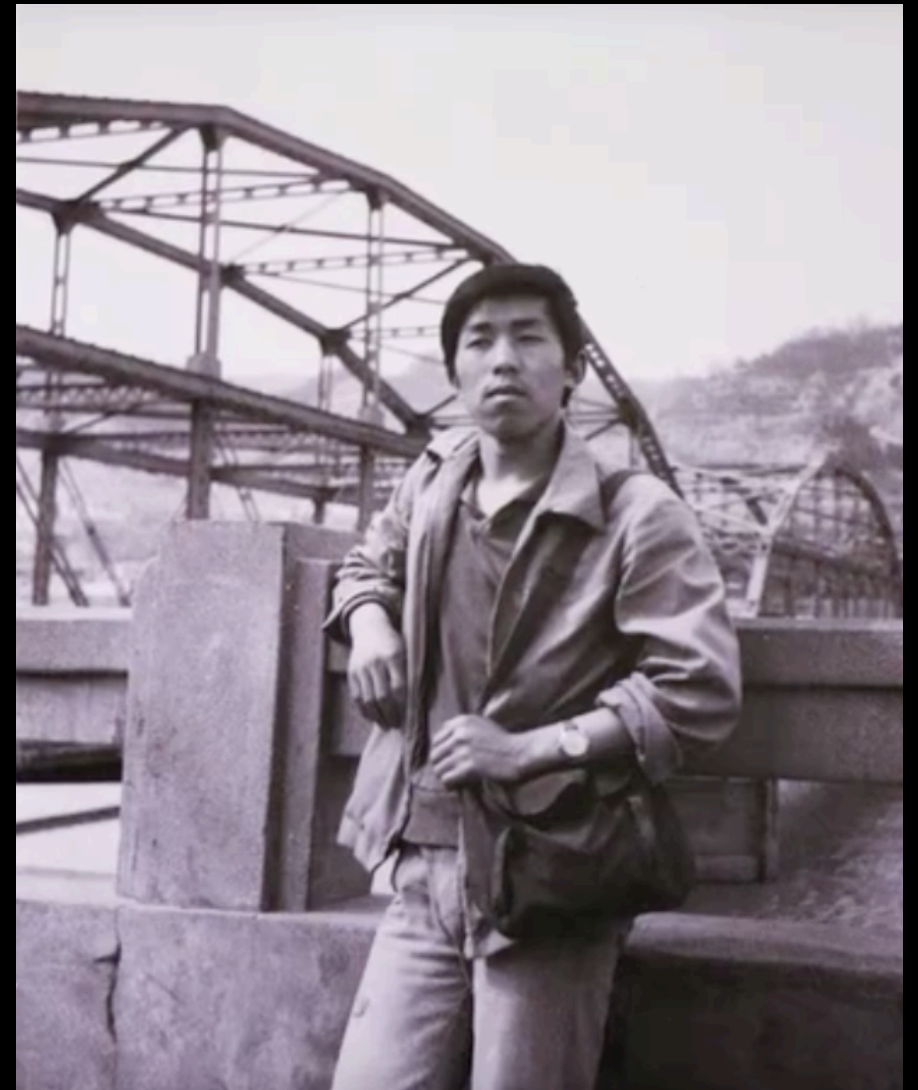
Migration

- From mid-1980s: migration to the cities. No state-assigned job, no urban registration. A “floating population” of ca. 80 mln by 2000 (Zai & Ma 2004)
- Many art college graduates turn down state-assigned jobs and move to the (peripheries of) cities, esp. Beijing — no more groups
 - “Vagrant artists” without urban registration, no official employment, often no family or stable home

Migration

- Yang quits his teaching job and joins them in 1998, moving to Beijing and making art while running a street food stall around Bangzijing:
- “When I arrived in Beijing, I had no fixed place to live, no fixed place to eat ... I was on the move every day, rushing around.”

(Yang Zhichao, 2014)



Yang Zhichao in Lanzhou (Zhongshan Bridge)

“Inside the Fourth Ring” (1999)

《四环以内》行为，1999
年7月26日至30日，北京

YZC lives for four days
as a beggar-migrant in
the city, keeping a
detailed diary, as an art
performance.



“A beggar is a person who is marginalised, who lives at the margins of society ... Without adopting this method [*of becoming migrant-beggars ourselves*] there would always be a glass barrier between us and the beggar. We wouldn’t really experience their condition and would remain but spectators, observers. That doesn’t work.”

Yang Zhichao, 2014



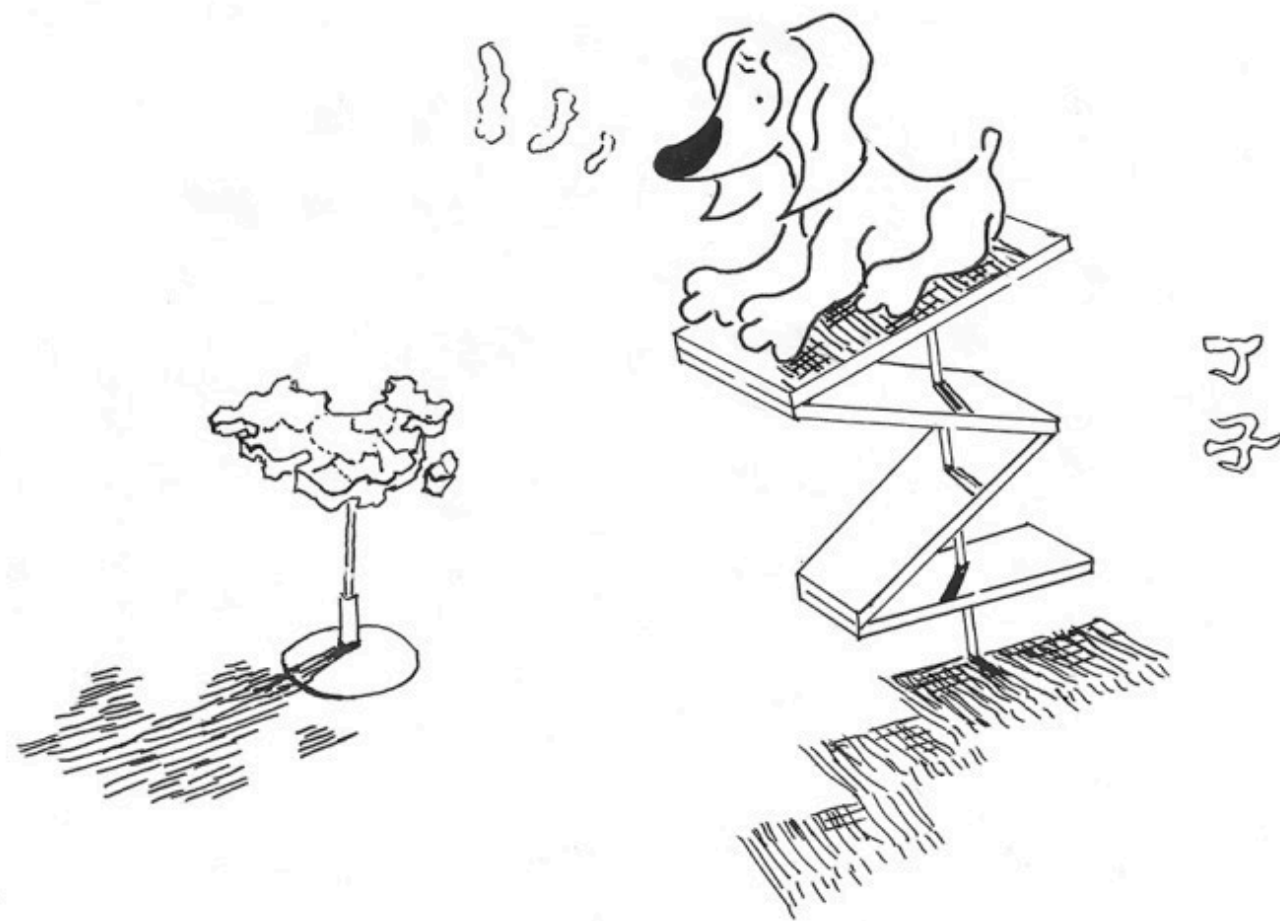
At the end of Day 4, YZC observes:
“Beggars live by depriving themselves as much as possible of the rights of the human being, and the more completely they deprive themselves of such rights, the more invincible they become ... Unlike any other condition, the beggar has the freedom, but does not enjoy the rights, that being human entails.”

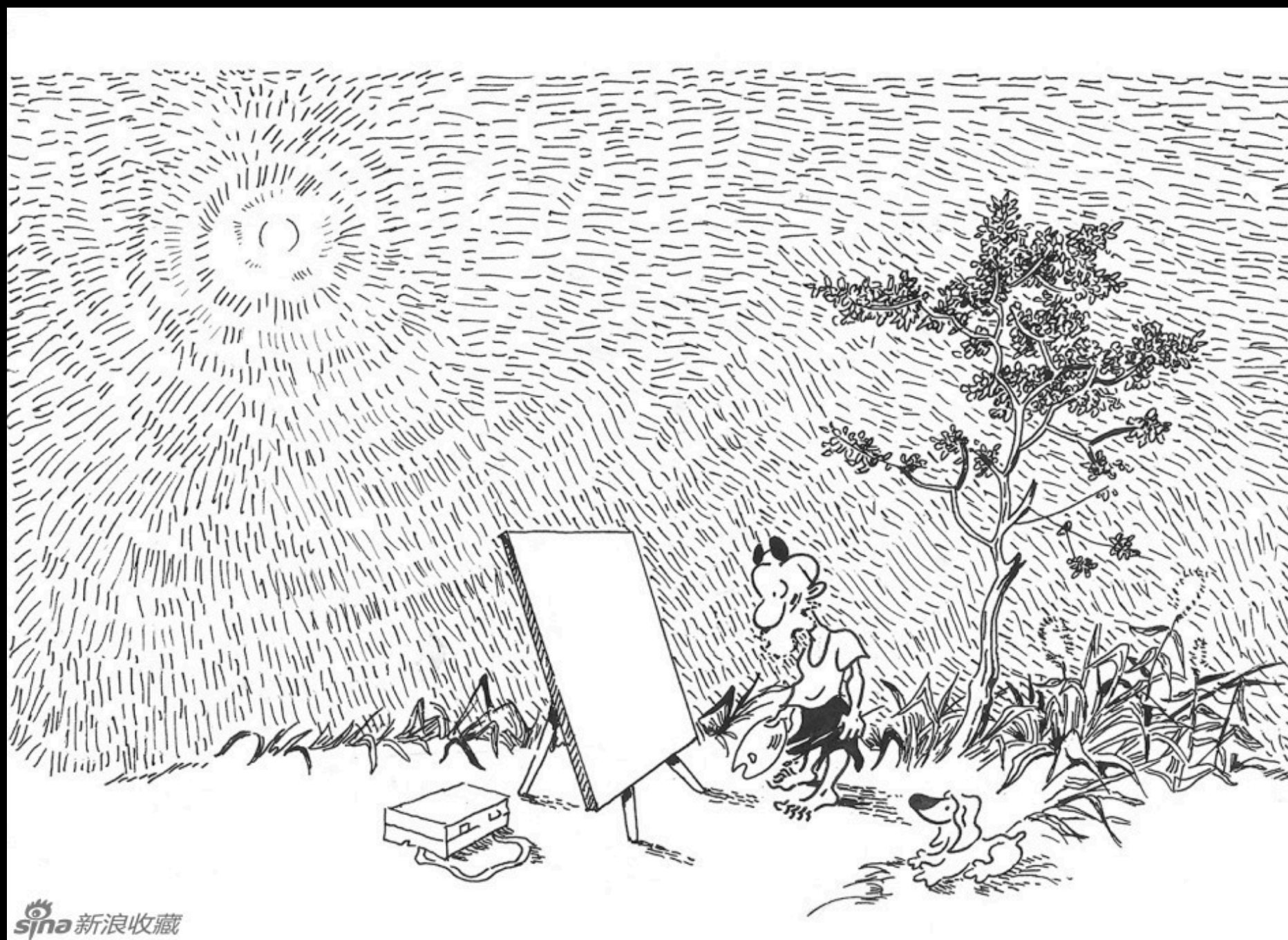


孔子, 丁子北漂记

*The Tale of Kongbu and Dingzi's Northern Drift,
2002-2007 (256 drawings)*



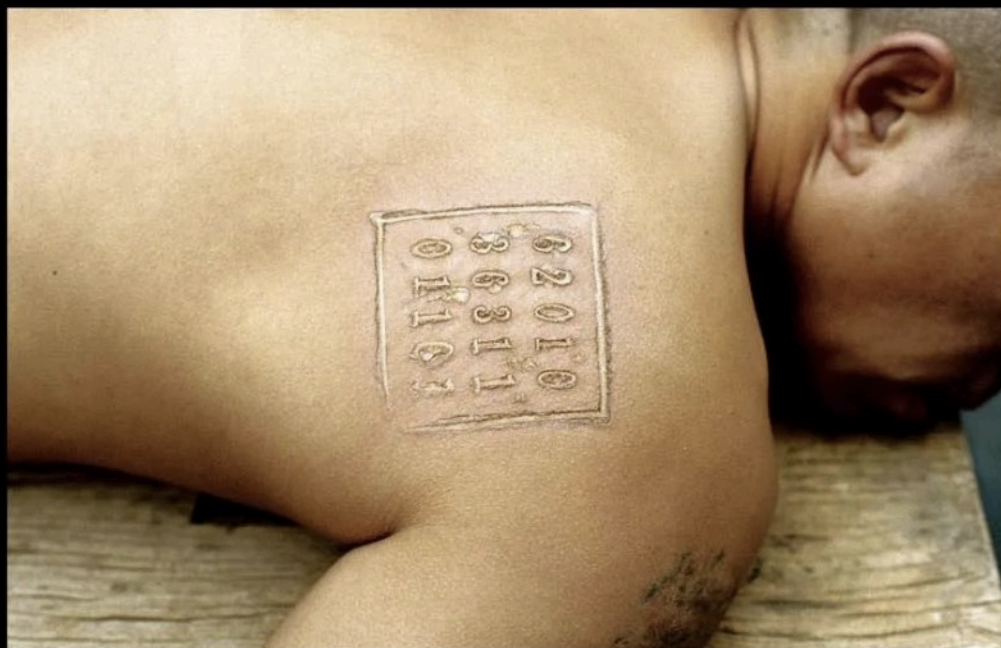






The comics are drawn on a 100-metre-long silk fabric roll using black ink mixed with Lidocaine





“Iron”, 2000

《烙》行为，2000年10月9日，
北京草场地艺术区



“Suntanning”, 2000

**《晒》行为，2000年7月10日，
北京草场地艺术区**

**“Jiayu Pass”, 1999-2000,
Jiayuguan**

**《嘉峪关》行为，1999年12月30
日-2000年1月30日，嘉峪关，**



Exh
cc

(附)

(99.12.300 - 2000.1.140)

(2000, 1. 218 - 2000, 1. 259)

和

[illegible]

北江/在江心时,予又做了点,松松的,又在江心,故是松松

病人(段瑞英)人乎(已生, 49岁)。我住在东地, 何日观察着它。从
凌晨来到西地, 以“彩霞”为典型之院而出, 胆肝肺、墨能
一腔血, 却在得通时, 是露露一腔(也许一生也眼明了以后), 旋指
和果顶土岩, 用人叫那堂上, 地底常小, 且云云一择人地方很口香, 粗粒
而疏极心, 牙咬的响叔(也许是打了一个个, 却灌上了闪电
会中, 年当时病人笑时, 金光四射, 但微如病人头量眼后, 他在趋势
余能人家系统...哩!这一招, 不学怎样人痛人, 都有截流之势。
其实, 累此之惨倒可少时解, 只是相与气舒伸之选择在此样人环境
如此样人环境, 情事满足他的欲望, 实足令人自望口呆, 方道生
鱼我意, 吓成地下, 与电战己。他不在这里整人永期剩余之时擦点
便宜, 明什么只有论把老话再仔细看与七眼心, 如果真有, 一是人作
近, 一是老无音无言(明白之后, 妙着快即死)。另一方面, 这样
的人石而在这样的环境如鱼得水, 岂像如同自家一择有没有味。
洋头已是, 拍过120, 即可以言正正常, 但不竟说各一人部上的相照,
我对地理不得其解: 怎么, 城市之或没市吗? 也未这个问题了
一遍又遍, 于是给我误认为自己错了, 竟有了病, 也是偏型在
十故事(关于我)就在甘肃的小县, 定下陇南一带(如果不是去
记清楚, 非经在兰州则读)的古称, 由于缺碑, 人的前代时子
病, 前总是脖子, 立刻就躺在村头的木树, 也似缺碑一样
同样坐着椅子, 这一景象, 他共拥着公人为得奖哭不得, 若不信出
分的样人环境, 更有什么样的人。这是这一说法, 越想来越
去, 放到社训性上区分造。

用同病家人取高票计, 志林管一人生平到台晋州, 及
走引天夜翻山越岭, 赶到合族建新理, 只知4番利星人民
不喜欢他, 便让四方手抽着他又送回了我国, 也不下批注化



病房外的院子



自拍像。病房内

院墙达，这就是剥夺意志的结果。他们在长年累月的封闭环境中，已无法适应
宽阔和光明，甚至惧怕自由和人群，这不能不说是文明的遗憾。病房里的病人
除了对穿白大褂的大夫不表示陌生外，任何一个新面孔都会引起怀疑并盯着你
观察，以预防有可能出现的危险，谨慎地活是他们的人生准则。

2000/1/2

- 6,45 起床，洗脸、刷牙。病人王其（化名）边洗边吐舌头，大笑。
7,35 吃药，氯丙咪嗪2片、安定1片。
7,48 早饭，稀饭1碗、萝卜咸菜1块、馒头1个。
8,05 病人坐在饭厅等待清点人数。
11,15 吃药，氯丙咪嗪2片、安定1片。
11,35 午饭，馒头1个，土豆烧牛肉半碗。菜上面一层黑糊糊的油，我
只吃了土豆和萝卜，没吃肉就倒了。什么样的饭也没人抱怨。
14,50 发烟，护士发，我领到“都宝”烟4根，香蕉1个。
17,35 晚饭，馒头1个。
20,35 交接班点名。
20,40 回去休息。
21,00 熄灯睡觉。

天还没亮，远处有一弯明月，在东南方还有一颗极亮的星。吃完药1小时，
开始产生反应，眼前发虚，眼眶深凹，前面的物体不确实，头晕，所有的都很
轻、很浮、很飘，倒有一种缥缈的舒适感，我由此明白为何精神药物长时间服
用可以产生依赖了。病人的眼眶深凹就是长期服药的结果，我不知连续服用下
去会有什么结果，愿上帝保佑我。今天中午原本不想记，吃药导致头虚虚的，
昏昏的只想睡觉，可我每天的记录时间只有这一会儿，其余时间病人总有活动
的，也只有坚持了。

今早，我问一个重病区的老人，名叫韦明远（化名），今年55岁，自1990
年这里办精神科就在此住院。我问：“你想出去吗？”

“想，可出不去。”

“你想家吗？”

“不想。”

“为啥？”

“我的父母死了。”

“没儿女来看你吗？”

“没有，我二十几岁就得了这病，没结婚。”

“想不想结婚？”

“不想。”

“为啥？”

- “What type of art is this performance? I call it a spiritual exploration or a spiritual experiment” (*Notes on Jiayu Pass*)
- Instead of violent psychopaths, he finds the maladjusted, the abandoned and the emotionally frustrated — individuals who’d failed to fit into “normal” structures of family, work and relationships.
 - Sedated into passivity, isolation and numbness.
- Similarity with *Inside the Fourth Ring*: Beggars and psychiatric patients as marginalised people of society; importance of marking the passage of time with the diary (Yang Zhichao 2014)
- Also: Symbolism of Temporal (old and new century) and Spatial liminality (end of Ming-era Great Wall, threshold of East and West)

- Writing in the framework of Western tradition in 1996, Agamben sought “political paradigms ... in experiences and phenomena that usually are not considered political or that are considered only marginally so:
- the state of exception (that temporary suspension of the rule of law that is revealed instead to constitute the fundamental structure of the legal system itself);
- the concentration camp (a zone of indifference between public and private as well as the hidden matrix of the political space in which we live);
- **the refugee**, formerly regarded as a marginal figure, who has become now the decisive factor of the modern nation-state by breaking the nexus between human being and citizen...” “Inasmuch as the refugee, an apparently marginal figure, unhinges the old trinity of state-nation-territory, it deserves instead to be regarded as the central figure of our political history.” (*Means without Ends*)

- In the context of contemporary China, YZC focusses on people and conditions that could be considered its most marginal, such as “floating” migrants,

but which are in fact central to the era’s political and socio-economic transformation in Reform-era China — from urbanisation to industrialisation and globalisation.

Thank you!